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ABSTRACT

Textbook censorship cases from Tennessee and Alabama have been brought before the U.S. Supreme Court. In east Tennessee, fundamentalist families objected to a 1983 Holt, Rinehart, and Winston reading series for grades 1-8. Federal District Judge Thomas G. Hull held that Hawkins County Schools had violated the families' First Amendment rights and ordered the system to permit the parents to teach reading at home. In Mobile, Alabama, Federal District Judge W. Brevard Hand said, "For purposes of the First Amendment, secular humanism is a religious belief system," and ordered that 44 elementary and secondary textbooks be removed from Alabama public schools. "Secular humanism" became a pejorative term in 1982 during the fundamentalist crusade against sex education in a Corvallis, Oregon high school. The fundamentalist crusade dates back to a reaction against Charles Darwin's "Origin of Species" (1859). Today, it is driven by fear of change, fear of crime, fear of drug use, and other dislocations in society. The organization People for the American Way makes several suggestions to prepare for censorship attacks. The key suggestions are that school systems need: (1) a publicized written selection policy for books and other media; (2) a list of elective and required courses, specifying those requiring parental permission; (3) a statement of the school's curriculum, goals, and philosophy; and (4) procedures for making, receiving, verifying, discussing, and resolving censorship complaints. School personnel, students, and parents should be familiar with the complaining organizations, their arguments, and vocabulary. Finally, censorship cases are usually curtailed when the educational community works together for quality education. (Thirty-five footnotes are appended.) (SM)

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by Franklin and Betty Parker

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Tennessee Case

Textbook censorship cases in Tennessee and Alabama, both likely to be resolved by the U.S. Supreme Court, are pending in 1987. In Hawkins County, East Tennessee, eleven fundamentalist families objected to a 1983 Holt, Rinehart & Winston reading series for grades 1-8. They charged that the books contain pacifist, magical, feminist, and anti-Christian themes. The parents asked for an alternative class using religiously acceptable books. The State of Tennessee, interceding for Hawkins County Schools, said that a separate class for religious objectors would violate the U.S. Constitution. On October 24, 1986, Federal District Judge Thomas G. Hull held that Hawkins County Schools had violated the families' First Amendment rights by not giving the children an alternative except to read the books or leave the school system. He ordered the school system to permit the parents to teach reading to their children at home, with school officials grading the children by standardized tests. Said Judge Hull: "The only thing I burdened Hawkins County to do was to offer a place for these children to go while the books were being used in class."[1] On textbooks he said: "They've almost whitewashed religion out of the schools. They've done it to try to satisfy everybody. They would write

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anything as long as they could sell it."[2] On evolution and creation, he said: "I think that either one could be taught; you can teach [creationism], but you can't preach it."[3]

Mobile, Alabama, Case

--In the second case, in Mobile, Alabama, on March 4, 1987, Federal District Judge W. Brevard Hand granted 624 fundamentalists' request that 44 elementary and secondary textbooks be removed from Alabama public schools because they advocated a humanistic "religion" and omitted Christian religious aspects of American life.[4] Judge Hand wrote, "For purposes of the First Amendment, secular humanism is a religious belief system."[5] Fundamentalists were jubilant: "This is exactly what we were asking for."[6] "Humanism is out of the closet for the first time," said the executive secretary of Pat Robertson's National Legal Fund.[7]

Countercharge: People for the American Way

A countercharge came from John H. Buchanan, chairman of People for the American Way (PAW), a civil liberties organization which monitors censorship. Judge Hand's ruling, he said, was "judicial bookburning and nothing less." Buchanan explained, "Secular humanism is really a straw man created by religious right leaders like Pat Robertson."[8]

Alabama Silent Prayer Law

The Mobile textbook censorship decision grew out of Alabama's earlier adoption of silent prayer in schools. When the law was challenged, as he knew it would be, Judge Hand upheld silent prayer in Alabama. He made the startling interpretation that the First Amendment affected only the federal government, not the states. If silent prayer was reversed by a higher court, he said, he would reopen the case by supporting fundamentalists' charge that secular humanism was being taught as a religion in public schools. Silent

prayer was, in fact, overturned by a higher court, and its unconstitutionality was upheld by the Supreme Court in 1985. Judge Hand kept his word to the fundamentalists by banning the 44 textbooks throughout Alabama. When silent prayer was challenged, he wrote:

> If this Court is compelled to purge 'God is great, God is good, we thank Him for our daily food' from the classroom, then this court must also purge from the classroom those things that serve to teach that salvation is through one's self rather than through a deity.[9]

Evangelist Pat Robertson pointed out why winning the Alabama textbook case was important:

> In Alabama in a lawsuit that was a continuation of the Alabama prayer case...we said, 'You are teaching humanism in the schools of Alabama,' and we sued the governor and we sued the school board....Alabama is a landmark move for religious freedom for Christian people and we are going to see that followed up in state after state, because we can challenge those people in every single state [where] they're doing it.[10]

Fundamentalists' Ultimate Aim

People for the American Way sees Federal Judge Hand as sympathetic to fundamentalists' beliefs. They see his censorship in Alabama as:

> the most ambitious example to date of the Far Right's effort to censor textbooks and inject sectarian beliefs into public school curriculum....Tennessee and Alabama reflect national efforts by Far Right organizations to reshape public education.[11]

Fundamentalists' ultimate aim was voiced by a leading religious right lawyer, Michael Farris. He said: "We may even see alternatives to public schools constitutionally mandated,"[12] meaning--and this is a

shocker--that religious schools might someday soon be state and federally recognized as equal with and eventual replacements for public schools. Moral Majority founder Jerry Falwell said the same thing even more bluntly:

> I hope in the next ten years...we will have more Christian day schools than...public schools. I hope I live to see the day when, as in the early days of our country, we won't have any public schools. The churches will have taken them over again and Christians will be running them. What a happy day that will be![13]

Increased Censorship

Book censorship incidents increased 35% in 1985-86 over the year before and increased 117% over PAW's first survey in 1981-82. PAW finds fundamentalists more active, better organized, more emboldened, and more sophisticated in their censorship attacks; finds that they are increasingly intimidating school boards; and finds that their focused harassment has increasingly frightened publishers into removing controversial materials from textbooks, eliminating the contribution of religion, and watering down textbooks ("dumbing" them down is a phrase often heard). These attacks come at a time of a projected large teacher shortage; when U.S. students' writing and critical thinking skills are said to be low; when students from other industrial nations are said to outscore ours in science and math; and when the nation has reached consensus to upgrade schools, as recommended in school reform reports.

Key Questions

Key questions educators and the public need to ask are: What is secular humanism? Why have fundamentalists seized upon that term?

Why do they call it a religion? Is the term secular humanism, as PAW believes, a subterfuge contrived to smear public schools as atheistic? We need to explore why publishers have been frightened to reduce, if not eliminate, accounts of the role religion has played in American history. We need to understand why fundamentalist attacks have become so organized, determined, and adamant. What faults in American society and schools worry them? In short, what lies behind textbook censorship?

What is Secular Humanism?

"Secular," of course, means non-religious. "Humanism" refers to the humanities: literature, philosophy, art, and so on, as distinct from the sciences. "Secular humanism" as a pejorative term, meaning something bad, was used significantly in a 1982 fundamentalist crusade against sex education in a Corvallis, Oregon, high school. Fundamentalist parent Susan Simonson, mother of seven, complained that the high school sex education course was a "how-to class instead of a not-to class." She saw a fundamentalist church film that warned against an anti-religion known as "secular humanism." Investigating further, she wrote to Mel and Norma Gabler of Longview, Texas, who review textbooks from a fundamentalist point of view, with mailings to 16,000 activists nationwide. The Gablers sent her material describing "secular humanism" as:

> Faith in man instead of faith in God....[It] promotes situation ethics; evolution; sexual freedom, including sex education courses; and internationalism....'Humanism' centers on 'self' because it recognizes no higher being to which man is responsible. Thus there is much

> emphasis in public education on each child having a 'positive self concept.' ...This eliminates coming to Christ for forgiveness of sin. It eliminates the Christian attributes of meekness and humility.[14]

Other Secular Humanist Opponents

> A Moral Majority source describes secular humanism as: An incorrect view of mankind, placing the created at the center of all things rather than the creator. From such a presupposition flow inevitable moral and ethical consequences that...have proved detrimental to the best interests of the human race.[15]

Another critic of secular humanism is Tim LaHaye, San Diego, California, minister recruited by Jerry Falwell for the Moral Majority. In his widely distributed book, THE BATTLE FOR THE MIND (he also wrote THE BATTLE FOR THE FAMILY and THE BATTLE FOR THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS), LaHaye says that 275,000 committed humanists have infiltrated and taken control of the U.S. Government, the courts, the media, the schools, and countless national organizations. He writes:

> We are being controlled by a small but very influential cadre of committed humanists who are determined to turn traditionally moral-minded America into an amoral, humanist country. Oh, they don't call it humanism. They label it DEMOCRACY, but they mean humanism in all its atheistic, amoral depravity.[16]

Other fundamentalist organizations opposing secular humanism include Beverly LaHaye's Concerned Women for America (she is The Rev. Tim LaHaye's wife), Phyllis Schlafly's Eagle Forum, Lottie Beth Hobbs's Pro-Family Forum, and others. A fundamentalist pamphlet,

WEEP FOR YOUR CHILDREN, claims:

> Our children become involved in alcohol, drugs, sex, and sex perversions, even in satanism, because of the lack of firm religious background—and the promotion of Humanists in our schools, our media, and other places.[17]

Secular Humanism as a Conspiracy

Fundamentalists see proof of a humanist conspiracy in statements published by the American Humanist Association in 1933 and 1973, describing and endorsing the noblest possibilities of human achievement, signed by non-theist intellectuals John Dewey, B. F. Skinner, Sidney Hook, and Isaac Asimov. Fundamentalists also make the startling claim that the U.S. Supreme Court has declared secular humanism to be the official religion of the United States, in violation of the First Amendment. They cite an obscure footnote in a 1961 court case listing secular humanism among religions, including Buddhism, which do not subscribe to an actual God. The 1961 Supreme Court case footnote referred to an actual California church that was called "Secular Humanist." On the basis of this passing reference, fundamentalists spin a conspiracy theory to prove that secular humanism is the official U.S. state religion.[18]

Secular Humanism Used to Defend Censorship

That fundamentalists deliberately used the alleged evils of secular humanism as a subterfuge in the Alabama textbook and other censorship cases was described in an ATLANTA CONSTITUTION editorial. Judge Hand, it stated, imbued:

> this nonsense with legal respectability....Spearheaded by the National Legal Fund (created by television preacher Pat Robertson), the Alabama textbook controversy was born....

> Worst of all, he has offered temporary encouragement to litigious bookbanning from coast to coast. Their cases ultimately will fail. But until they do, the shadow of legal activity will harass and intimidate countless local school boards.[19]

Role of Religion Ignored?

Evidence shows that textbook publishers have indeed become intimidated and have played into the hands of fundamentalists. Wanting to sell textbooks and fearful of offending their critics, publishers have reduced and removed the important role religion played in the origin and progress of the United States.

"Don't teach religion; teach about it," urged a rabbi and a Lutheran minister, writing in THE NEW YORK TIMES. They added:

> The removal of religion as a subject of study has dismayed many responsible educators, parents, and mainstream religious leaders who...support the Supreme Court's stand that the public schools have the right to teach about religion but not to teach which religious beliefs are correct.... The distinction between teaching the 'truth' of religion and teaching 'about' religion is vital.[20]

Publishers and Religion

The president of Laidlaw Educational Publishers, one of whose books Judge Hand censored in Alabama, admitted, "There has not been an appropriate amount of time spent on the role of religion in society."[21] A 1986 report on textbooks criticized a Laidlaw sixth grade social studies book for not mentioning God in discussing Joan of Arc. Other books were criticized for not mentioning that Martin Luther King, Jr., was a Baptist minister.[22]

The most damaging report, published July 1, 1987, by the prestigious Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, assailed "bland" textbooks that "virtually ignore religion." "The quest for religious freedom that fueled the establishment of this nation received scant treatment at best in many textbooks," it said, faulting in this respect most American history, political science, sociology, literature, and world history textbooks.[23]

Complaint that textbook publishers neglect the place of religion in U.S. and world affairs has merit, a fault publishers now recognize and seem ready to correct. Yet it was fundamentalist attacks which scared off publishers in the first place.

Why Textbooks Went Wrong

Other reasons for watered down textbooks in religious and academic content were cited by NEW YORK TIMES education writer Fred M. Hechinger. He points out that as college enrollments skyrocketed and new textbook markets expanded, two-year colleges, which grew most rapidly, wanted texts more like those written for high school. Young and inexperienced faculty wanted teaching manuals and ready-made tests. As conglomerates gobbled up textbook houses, editors, who were more often market experts than scholars, sought increased profits from a mass audience. As knowledge expanded, particularly in the sciences, the safest policy seemed to be to leave everything in, including outdated and questionable material. Thus textbooks inevitably became larger in size, more expensive, often poorly written, and lightly edited. Hechinger says responsibility for correction lies with leading faculty to speak out against flawed books and refuse to buy and assign them.[24]

What Lies Behind the Fundamentalist Crusade?

Fear of change, fear of crime, drug use, divorce, abortion, AIDS, teenage suicide, and other dislocations of our time have made fundamentalis determined to return America to a simpler age of Christian morality. One can go back to fundamentalist reaction against Charles Darwin's ORIGIN OF SPECIES, 1859. This book offered evidence that all life evolved gradually over millions of years by natural selection. Disliking Darwinian evolution for casting doubt on divine creation, fundamentalists were also upset by largely German late nineteenth-century Bible scholars' evidence that the Bible was written by mortals at different times and places and included myths and possible forgeries.

Most people accepted Darwinian evolution, science, higher Bible criticism, and secular life and government, and still remained religious and led moral lives. Fundamentalists, however, held an important 1895 Bible conference in Niagara, New York, which affirmed the Christian doctrines of Bible inerrancy, Christ's divinity, virgin birth, absolution for man's sin, resurrection, and second coming. This affirmation, distributed by the millions in a pamphlet series called THE FUNDAMENTALS, 1910-1915, largely inspired in the 1920s anti-liquor Prohibition laws and anti-evolution teaching laws. Speeches by fundamentalist politician William Jennings Bryan (three-time Democratic candidate for the U.S. Presidency) spurred the introduction of 37 anti-evolution bills in 20 state legislatures. They passed in five states, including Tennessee. Most Tennessee legislators felt they had to vote for the anti-evolution bill in March 1925 in order to be re-elected. The Tennessee governor who signed it said, "Nobody believes that it is going to be an active statute."[25]

Who Won the Scopes Trial?

An American Civil Liberties Union test case in Dayton, Tennessee, 1925, pitted fundamentalist William Jennings Bryan against agnostic Chicago lawyer Clarence Darrow. John Thomas Scopes, a high school science teacher, was found guilty of teaching evolution and fined.[26] Fundamentalists may have been laughed at in the press, but they won the Scopes trial and also won educationally. Frightened publishers downplayed evolution. A study of biology textbooks noted:

> Self censorship exercised by the New York-based publishing industry...shaped the content of high school biology courses for 35 years following the Scopes trial....Publishers and authors feared that a good treatment of evolution meant the loss of the southern market.[27]

This down-playing of evolution in biology textbooks lasted until the post-Sputnik National Science Foundation (NSF) financed new biology textbooks after 1958.

Evolution and the Creationists

Reinstatement of evolution in widely used biology textbooks provoked the rise of creationists, focus of fundamentalist concern in the 1960s and '70s. Convinced that they could not legally dislodge evolution teaching, creationists demanded equal time for creation science teaching, based on Genesis, as a strategy which they thought they could win, convinced as they were of Americans' sense of fair play. Equal time was won in California under conservative Governor Ronald Reagan and conservative Superintendent of Instruction Max Rafferty.[28]

Creationists were also encouraged when fundamentalists largely won a 1974-75 campaign around Charleston, West Virginia, against alleged dirty textbooks. More encouragement came when Congress stopped NSF's 1975 funding because fundamentalists objected to an

NSF-financed sixth-grade social studies course, "Man: A Course of Study" (MAC S) for mentioning in course materials such Eskimo customs as wife swapping, incest, cannibalism, and robbery.[29]

West Virginia Censorship, 1975

Creationists flourished nationally, as did textbook censors, the Heritage Foundation, the Moral Majority, and others of the fundamentalist right, in widespread press reaction to the West Virginia textbook controversy. What one observer said about West Virginia textbook censorship in 1975 is applicable today:

> This country is experiencing a religious crusade as fierce as any out of the Middle Ages....Our children are being sacrificed because of the fanatical zeal of our fundamentalist brothers who claim to be hearing the voice of God. People are confused and angry about everything from marijuana to Watergate. Feeling helpless and left out, they are looking for a scapegoat, eager to exorcise all that is evil and foul, cleanse or burn all that is strange and foreign. In this religious war, spiced with overtones of race and class, the books are an accessible target.[30]

Louisiana's Creation Science Law Unconstitutional

By 7-2 vote on June 19, 1987, the U.S. Supreme Court declared unconstitutional Louisiana's 1981 equal time creation science/evolution teaching law. It was a seemingly decisive defeat for fundamentalists' 60-year battle against evolution teaching and their 20-year strategy for substituting Genesis-based creation science. Leading creation science lawyer Wendell R. Bird still believes reversal possible. "With four justices approaching age 80," he said,

"the Court won't stay the same forever."[31] A vow of continued creation science effort came from former Louisiana legislator Bill Keith, who originally introduced the bill, carefully worded to camouflage its religious intent. He now publishes Christian books in Texas and heads the Creation Science Legal Defense Fund.[32]

Seventy-two Nobel laureates and 24 science organizations filed court briefs against creationism. A relieved Louisiana high school assistant principal said, "We don't have the money now to be spending on bad science."[33] Harvard biology professor Stephen J. Gould labeled creation science "a ruse and sham." He said, "This victory belongs to the teachers." He warned that "The larger struggle is not over and never will be."[34]

What Educators and the Public Can Do

A People for the American Way pamphlet lists 20 suggestions to prepare for censorship attacks, the key ones being: school systems need a publicized written policy for book and other media selection; a list of elective and required courses, specifying those requiring parental permission; a statement of the school's curriculum, goals, and philosophy of education; along with procedures for making, receiving, verifying, discussing, and resolving censorship complaints. School personnel, students, and parents should be familiar with far-right organizations, including the Gablers, their literature, arguments, and vocabulary--especially the catch-all term of "secular humanism." Finally, censorship cases are usually curtailed when the educational community works together for quality education.[35] The price of liberty is eternal vigilance.

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